



Historic Britain

About twenty centuries ago, Great Britain was inhabited by the Britons, a Celtic people. In 55 BC Julius Caesar crossed the Channel and landed on the island. The Romans introduced their civilization and their language into the country. They constructed roads, magnificent buildings, theatres, baths and villas. At Bath there are imposing ruins of a Roman bath, and in the north of England there are remains of Hadrian's Wall, a system of fortifications 73 miles long, which was erected by the Emperor Hadrian to consolidate the northern frontier of the Province.

The Roman domination lasted about 400 years. In 410 A.D., Rome had to call back her legions, and new invaders from the Continent crossed the North Sea: the Angles and the Saxons. They settled in the country they called England, pushing the Romanised Britons west and north. The people who live in Wales and Scotland today are of Celtic origin and some still speak Celtic dialects.

During the seven centuries of Anglo-Saxon rule, Britain was invaded by the Vikings from Scandinavia, and by the Danes from Denmark, and traces of their languages still exist in modern English.

One event, however, really changed the history of Britain: the Battle of Hastings in 1066. At Hastings, William the Conqueror, Duke of Normandy, defeated the Anglo-Saxon king, Harold, and conquered the country. He was the last foreign invader of England.

At the time of the Norman Conquest, three languages were in use in the island: Norman French was the language of the court and the nobility, Latin was the language of the Church, and Anglo-Saxon was the language of the common people.

Anglo-Saxon survived as the national language, but it was greatly changed. When the Norman conquerors mixed with the conquered Anglo-Saxons to such an extent as to become one people, Anglo-Saxon gradually became a new language into which many French and Latin words were introduced.

Comprehension Questions

1. Who were the Britons?
2. What did the Romans do in Britain?
3. How long did the Roman domination last?
4. What happened to the Britons when the Anglo-Saxons settled in the country?
5. Why are there traces of Scandinavian languages in modern English?
6. Who was William the Conqueror?



7. What languages were in use in England at the time of the Norman Conquest?
8. Which of these languages survived as the national language?

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Answer Key

1. The Britons were a Celtic people who were the original inhabitants of Great Britain.
2. They introduced their language and civilization into the country and built roads and buildings.
3. It lasted for about 400 years.
4. They were pushed west and north.
5. Because Britain was invaded by the Vikings and the Danes.
6. He was the Duke of Normandy, who invaded Britain in 1066.
7. Latin, Norman French and Anglo-Saxon.
8. Anglo-Saxon.